

Presidential Migratory Bird Federal Stewardship Award Nomination

U.S. Coast Guard Academy: Roseate Tern and Piping Plover Conservation Project

Project Partners: Department of Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge; Coast Guard Academy Chief Petty Officers Association, New London, CT; Connecticut College, New London CT; Audubon Connecticut Society; New London Magnet High School, New London, CT; Boy Scouts of America, Westchester, NY.

Protecting our precious natural resources is espoused and recognized by the U.S. Coast Guard as an essential component of preserving maritime tradition. Cadets at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy are future Coast Guard Officers that, one day, will have a mission or position that may involve migratory birds. After Hurricane Irene, cadets from the Academy Sustainability Club learned that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) lost all of its ground nesting boxes specifically designed to protect for Connecticut's only endangered bird species, the Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*). Cadets leveraged non-federal partner support and organized a "Tern Box Building Day" event where 200 nesting boxes were built in one day. The new nesting boxes, a portion for use and the rest for future activities, are expected to increase the survival rate of the Roseate Tern chicks to about 80%. 15 of the nesting boxes fledged approximately 16 Roseate Tern chicks, equating to a productivity of >1 chick per nesting pair.



The building event began a partnership project between the Academy Sustainability Club and the NWR staff - in conjunction with Connecticut College Environmental Club, Audubon Connecticut, and others - to focus on enhancing and restoring habitat along the coast of Connecticut for federally endangered and threatened species, as well as other migratory bird species such as herons and egrets.

Falkner Island is a component of the NWR. It is part of the Atlantic flyway, and is the nesting site of the third-largest Roseate Tern colony in the northeastern United States. Working with NWR staff, cadets organized Falkner Island habitat management volunteer days as a follow-up to the building event. USCGA Sustainability Club cadets, staff, Connecticut College students, and a Boy Scout troop travelled out to Falkner Island on various occasions to conduct habitat management activities for the Roseate and common terns that breed on the island, as well as to set-up the nest boxes for the season's nesting pairs.

Cadets and their non-federal partners also worked with NWR staff to enhance habitat for the federally threatened Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*). Predation and habitat loss are affecting

populations of this species. Cadets and partners addressed these factors by cleaning up the habitat at the NWR Milford Point Unit in order to discourage predators and human activity. NWR staff predicts that, with new overwash habitat created by recent storms, the unit may support between 2-6 breeding pairs this year and may also attract other migratory species like Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*).

U.S. Coast Guard Academy cadets and their non-federal partners are invested in NWR. Within a year, they have volunteered the time equivalent of 95 full-time workdays at no cost to the government. They will continue to volunteer and follow up with Falkner Island and Milford Point, and are working to address issues caused by Super Storm Sandy, particularly along the NWR Outer and Thimble islands.